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HOME, A FAMILY-CREATED CENTER

A radio talk by Ella Gardner, Extension Service, broadcast Wednesday, April 1, 1936, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, transmitted by NBC and a network of 51 affiliated radio stations.

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I want to report to you today on a phase of home demonstration work which has grown up in recent years in response to a demand from farm families in many States. These families wanted help in training present and future homemakers to arrange spare-time activities that would make home life more enjoyable.

Now, you can't gain that sort of information by experimenting in a laboratory. Home demonstration workers turned to the natural source -- the experience of members of families who have made their home lives enjoyable.

From their accounts, some general ideas have emerged. These are what I want to present to you today. We have observed that the farm families with the most enjoyable home life usually plan the farm and home work so that all members may have some leisure time; that they provide a place for individual and family recreation. But they don't grit their teeth and say "this family is going to have a good time, or else"; they make taking part in the family good times a matter of free choice with each member.

As to the necessity of planning for leisure time: In study of the spare time of boys and girls in certain sections of West Virginia and Vermont, many children were found who had no time except on Sunday to do as they pleased. Of course some of this was because they fooled over doing their chores, but much of it could be directly charged to the fact that their parents failed to arrange the work well and to train their children -- and themselves -- to do it efficiently.

Given time, the second important need is a place in which to do the things you want to do. One of the proudest boys I ever met was discovered on that West Virginia study. He and his father working together, had made an inlaid hope chest for his sister. One thousand pieces had gone into this superlative piece of work and his dad, who, he admitted, is the "smartest man ever", had found all of the material for it in their own woodshed. They gave each other "tools and things" for Christmas, he said, and had a wonderful shop in the shed. Even though not every father may work with his son as this man did, the fathers of families with an enjoyable home life generally at least help the children to secure a place in which to work and tools for carrying out their interests.

It is not only a workshop but also a spot of one's own in which to store treasures, to which to retire when the world is too much to endure, and certainly when friends begin to "call" instead of "coming over to play" it is absolutely necessary to have a place in which to entertain, undisturbed by unsympathetic adult eyes.

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Besides the individual's own spot, there is need for centers for family recreation. Some families may have room for nothing more than two stakes for horseshoe pitching. Other more fortunate families develop a real outdoor play center with perhaps a court for tennis, volley and basketball, a sandbox and swings, a pole for tether ball, and even an outdoor fireplace and picnic spot

A friend in North Carolina has made a small camp ground in a grove of pines on the back of their lot. The 2 boys of the family and their friends -- to the number of 10 or more sometimes -- cook, sleep out, and camp to their hearts' content out there.

Families that enjoy outdoor recreation will not be without an indoor place. The attic and cellar are two spots that have been successfully developed as game rooms. As the children have grown older in one family that I know, the old back parlor has been devoted to ping pong, table games and dancing. The young people come there from all around and best of all, in the parents' opinion, their own youngsters are glad to stay home.

So much of this seems to mean that the family stays together and does things as a unit that it may be well to point out the fact that family unity does not mean that all members of the family must do the same thing but rather that each follows his own inclination, sure of sympathetic interest and appreciation from the others. I remember a mother who said in a worried tone that her older children could always be depended upon to make a scene when it was time to go for a Sunday drive to visit the relatives. Well, why wouldn't they if their friends were planning to do something really interesting or if they were absorbed in a book or a hobby of their own? I've known fathers to object just as strenuously to attending a dinner or some other meeting of special interest to their wives, haven't you? We want to do what we like to do and what our friends are doing. Let those who enjoy the drive take it.

Family unity depends much more upon mutual understanding and enjoyment than it does upon doing things together as a unit. There are some high occasions like Christmas or grandmother's birthday that may be dedicated to a whole-family celebration. Except for them each member of the family feels free to develop himself as an individual. Family unity makes great strides through leisure interests but it is a spiritual rather than a tangible thing.

Time, adequate play place, sympathetic understanding and freedom to follow one's interests seem to be important in making home life enjoyable. Later on in these programs I should like to discuss more specifically some of the interests that have been developed by farm families to enrich home life.

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